CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWELFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Tuesday, 2 February 1999, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Grey (United States of America)

GE.99-60537 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 812th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should like at the outset, on behalf of the Conference, to welcome the Under-Secretary for Legal and International Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif, who will be the first speaker this morning. I also have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Venezuela and Belgium.

I now invite the Under-Secretary for Legal and International Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif, to make his statement.

Mr. ZARIF (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I should also express my delegation's sincere appreciation to your predecessor for his distinguished work. Let me also take this opportunity to express the regrets of the Foreign Minister who, for programmes unforeseen in the past, could not attend this session of the Conference, and assure you of his personal commitment to the work that you are doing here.

We, on the eve of a new millennium, are standing at a defining crossroad in the history of humanity. Scientific and technological breakthroughs, growing interdependence, impressive development of standards of behaviour at the international level, and the emergence of a global consensus to prevent war and curb the perils of armaments and, particularly, weapons of mass destruction are indeed significant achievements of the twentieth century. Translating these general developments in terms of concrete progress in the field of disarmament, one may note the promotion of multilateralism in all fields of disarmament negotiations, the conclusion and entry into force of an array of significant disarmament treaties, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the forthcoming additional protocol to the BWC, providing for a verification regime, and finally the end of a hysterical arms race between the super-Powers.

However, in spite of these historic accomplishments, the twentieth century will also be remembered for vivid images of unspeakable horror and bloodshed resulting from our failure to forge an inclusive global security system, in a world in which man, enabled by science, is capable of his own total destruction. The absence of such a system has exacerbated the security dilemma and led to the employment of science for production of the most lethal weapons of all.

For a very long time, the balance of terror, coupled with military block security umbrellas - an exclusive privilege provided solely to members of the two major alliances and their associates - have been presumed to ensure security. The security dilemma and the prevalence of terror have also been the driving force behind the temptation and the quest by some to acquire the

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most lethal weapons, in particular nuclear ones. The recent developments in South Asia offer yet another set of disturbing evidence of the fact that the temptation and the quest would continue to survive as long as we fail to forge a new approach to security and particularly to complete nuclear disarmament.

Perilous signs are looming in the horizon. The risks are real, immense and impending. With the uncertainties associated with the transitional nature of the global order, a tremendous obsession is evident to preserve military supremacy or assume a more prominent global role in the future order through acquisition of more advanced weapons of greater range, accuracy and lethality, something that might quite unravel the progress towards disarmament achieved earlier in this decade.

It is high time to change this predominant yet erroneous security paradigm. Fundamental to this is the adoption of a new approach towards international security going beyond the boundaries of the residuals of the bipolar system, which is fixated in the past. It is no longer acceptable or even practical to divide the international community into two distinct groupings: one living behind the walls of fortresses of alliances and weapons of mass destruction, while the security concerns of others are completely neglected as they are depicted as the source of possible threat and worthy of containment and deprivation. It is specially alarming that pseudo-scientific theories of clash are advanced in order to perpetuate the policies of rivalry and exclusion, and even sanctify them as the unavoidable consequences of civilizational disharmony.

The time has come to replace military block security umbrellas with a new and innovative concept of Global Security Networking, a truly global networking mechanism for inclusive and participatory global security, which uses the existing mechanisms in complementary rather than competing schemes.

In shaping this new global security, we should agree that weapons of mass destruction should have no place in any global security networking and should be banned altogether and destroyed. We cannot seek to establish a civilized community of human beings and States without accepting the premiss that all peoples and all States have an equal right to survive and to guarantee peace and security for citizens. Mass destructive weapons, by their very existence, undermine this basic principle as well as the most fundamental human rights and the very foundations of international humanitarian law. We should not accept that our children in the coming millennium should continue to live under the horrifying shadow of possible use of these weapons. We must ensure that the people of Iran and Japan are the very last victims of weapons of mass destruction of any type, at any time, and under any pretext whatsoever. This, of course, requires enlightened, serious and coordinated endeavour at the national, regional and international levels.

It is a source of deep satisfaction to see that the Chemical Weapons Convention has entered into force. The Convention, through its comprehensive verification regime, can indeed operate as a major confidence-building

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mechanism by ensuring that such weapons are removed from the military arsenal and the defence strategies of States parties within a 10-year time span. Yet this mechanism can become enormously more dependable by promoting its universality, in particular in sensitive regions including the Middle East. Equally important is that we should not settle for less than full implementation of the Convention. Selective and partial implementation of the Convention, or introduction of conditions, in addition to being a clear violation of its letter and spirit, would irreparably undermine its credibility and relevance.

Biological Weapons are already banned by the 1972 Convention. The ongoing efforts to strengthen the Convention through the establishment of an effective verification system deserve our support. The need for serious negotiations to establish such a system at the earliest possible date has been strongly underlined by the international community, most recently during a ministerial meeting held in New York last September. Biological weapons are amongst the most destructive and inhuman weapons ever conceived and we have the political and moral responsibility to ensure that these weapons will never be developed, used or stockpiled. The protocol under negotiation should therefore be effective and strike a balance between the rights and obligations of the States parties. It should envisage provisions and, if necessary, should establish mechanisms to ensure and facilitate the peaceful use and exchange of material, equipment and technology among States parties. We are prepared to cooperate with all States concerned in order to ensure the conclusion of negotiations on the protocol before the year 2000.

As regards nuclear disarmament, practical measures are yet to be taken. Save for some piecemeal undertakings, including a host of bilateral agreements, the path to comprehensive nuclear disarmament is largely untravelled. Political, security and military considerations of nuclear-weapon States have made the process of total elimination of nuclear weapons a more difficult and complex enterprise. But that by no means justifies the disengagement of the international community, the multilateral forums and, above all, the Conference on Disarmament from considering ways and means to promote nuclear disarmament. In fact, in the initial stages, banning the other categories of weapons of mass destruction was considered somehow ambitious, impractical and unfeasible. But through the mobilization of the necessary political will at the global level, we were able to resolve many difficult, and at times fundamental, differences over issues which apparently seemed insurmountable. This seems even more relevant to nuclear disarmament. What continues to be lacking is the political will to abandon theories and strategies which belong to the past.

I believe that nuclear disarmament needs to be pursued within a practical approach structured in three phases: short-, medium- and long-term. Promotion of confidence is at the heart of short-term initiatives, which would be pursued by the nuclear-weapon States bilaterally and multilaterally. Vigorous reduction of nuclear weapons, coupled with certain specific measures, including de-alerting of nuclear forces, detargeting of nuclear weapons, ratification of START 2 as well as finalization and implementation of START 3, should be accorded priority.

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For the medium term, the main focus should be on multilateral agreements codifying legal restraints on the use of nuclear weapons. In this area, an agreement to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons - which, in our view, can best be pursued within the NPT context - a treaty to ban the first use of nuclear weapons, and finally a convention on the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons, should be worked out.

At the same time, we should continue to strengthen the non-proliferation regime and continue vigorously initiatives to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones in various parts of the world, particularly in the more sensitive regions.

The first two phases inch us closer to the ultimate goal of comprehensive nuclear disarmament. And at last, the final stage would offer negotiations on a global treaty banning nuclear weapons and providing for their destruction under effective international control.

The NPT was indefinitely extended to prepare the ground for nuclear disarmament. We must all ensure that this shall happen. And we all, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, have the responsibility to ensure the success of the non-proliferation regime in all its aspects, which also includes the eventual total elimination of these weapons. Nuclear disarmament, in our view, would preserve the Treaty's integrity and credibility.

The non-proliferation regime is facing fresh challenges. The CTBT is in peril, while statements from India and Pakistan lead to some optimism that we could resume the right track. The unsafeguarded nuclear facilities in the Middle East are a real threat to the non-proliferation regime. Israel, in defiance of numerous calls from the international community, has refused to place its nuclear programme and facilities under IAEA safeguards and continues with its clandestine programmes. This is an alarming policy that menaces global and regional peace and security. The Year 2000 NPT Review Conference should seriously and frankly address this concern and offer practical solutions.

The Conference of Disarmament, as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body, has a very prominent role in ensuring global peace and in moving towards global security networking. It has been the main launching board for various disarmament treaties and likewise it should remain. To preserve such an outstanding role, the Conference has to design a grand strategy. Things should happen by design and not by default. We need to know where we are heading. The agenda, programme of work and the ad hoc committees of the Conference should reflect our collectively agreed grand strategy. Running the risk of appearing overly optimistic, I believe that this is possible, provided that the requisite political will, determination and commitment could be mobilized.

The question of the expansion of the CD is, in our view, a part of this broad picture. We understand the rationale of universality of the CD. Nonetheless, one should not lose sight of the fact that there is a close

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correlation between the expansion of the CD and its efficiency. The CD is meant to be a negotiating body, and as such it should be manageable and able to perform its functions effectively so as to live up to the expectations of the world community.

We also appreciate the aspirations of the five candidates for membership in the CD that have waited long for their admission. We sympathize with their national aspirations to join the CD and we tend to accommodate them. Given our general approach regarding the future and the emerging role of the Conference, this has required a long and difficult process of assessment.

As for the future, the issues of expansion and efficiency need to be seen together and to be revisited in the light of a careful assessment of the impact of previous expansion on the efficiency of the Conference. In any event, transparency in the decision-making process on this issue is an absolute necessity on which we shall not compromise in the future. Furthermore, any future proposal must be fitted within a general policy of expansion as opposed to a piecemeal approach.

As we enter a new millennium, we need to adopt a new perspective. We need to revisit old strategies and doctrines, which were founded on theoretically weak and historically unsound constructs like deterrence and the balance of power, or indeed of terror. The challenge of the twenty-first century is not just loose nukes, not even nukes per se; the challenge is the mentality that believes any country whatsoever still needs nukes or can justify having them or claim that they are safe in their arsenal.

Doctrines and policies of the arms race, block formations and exclusions have not brought our global community any real sense of security or peace. We need to rethink these very policies and reassess our fundamental assumptions; and I regret that this has yet to happen. Before a new round of rivalry and exclusion is entrenched, perpetuated and sanctified through the theories of clash and conflict between nations and civilizations, the international community must adopt the strategy of dialogue, tolerance and inclusion. The Conference on Disarmament's mission for the twenty-first century must centre on active pursuit of this imperative, breaking away from outdated perspectives, and beginning to look seriously at new paradigms such as global security networking.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Under-Secretary for Legal and International Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Venezuela, Ambassador Rodríguez Cedeño.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ CEDEÑO (Venezuela) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, allow me first of all to congratulate you on behalf of my delegation on taking office as President of the Conference during this first month, which is of fundamental importance for the organization of our work. We are certain that your skill and experience, along with the common political will and desire to cooperate with you, will facilitate the adoption of decisions on the programme of work, which is the only means of enabling us

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to make progress in handling the substance of the various items of the Conference's agenda. My delegation stands ready to give you its full support to ensure the earliest possible adoption of the decisions required truly to get down to our substantive work, as the international community expects from us. We cannot allow time to elapse without the Conference achieving an agreement on the manner in which its work will be organized.

On this occasion I would like to make some general comments on the central issue that should engage our attention, the negotiations on nuclear disarmament and the creation of a comprehensive and universal legal regime, as well as endeavouring to reflect our position on other agenda items.

General and complete disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, encompassing principally, of course, nuclear disarmament, an item which my delegation deems to be the first priority, is an objective and an aspiration of the international community. This status was granted at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in 1978, and has since been reiterated in several international documents. More recently, General Assembly resolution 53/77 X, adopted in December last year, reaffirms this status in reiterating to the Conference "the establishment, on a priority basis, of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament to commence negotiations early on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament and for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons with a specified framework of time through a nuclear weapons convention".

The negotiating process, in a state of stagnation which we regret, stemming from the obvious absence of political will, must be seen firstly in a global context and then from a standpoint which is not exclusively political. To our mind it is essential to design a comprehensive and universal legal regime which meets the expectations of the international community and creates sufficient confidence in international relations for the establishment of a world free of nuclear weapons. While it is true that important progress has been made in recent years, as regards the reduction of nuclear weapons, testing and the prevention of their proliferation, serious and definitive efforts must still be made to succeed in eradicating once and for all the threat of the annihilation of the world through the use of these weapons of mass destruction. The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty is doubtless a very positive sign as regards progress in the negotiations on nuclear disarmament. But the prohibition of nuclear tests is just one element in a programme of nuclear disarmament. This Treaty is not an end in itself; it is a marginal though certainly important step towards a world free of nuclear weapons, just like, in our view, the negotiations on the prohibition of the production of fissile material and on negative security assurances which are also elements of that programme.

The consideration of the item of nuclear disarmament, in particular, is, as I said before, a priority and hence so is the adoption of such measures as the Conference by consensus considers pertinent, to initiate as soon as possible consultations and negotiations on this crucial matter. From the outset, as you know, we have supported the reconstitution of the troika as an essential interim step to continue considering the item, until such time as

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the Conference decides on the most appropriate mechanism to that end. My delegation supports the urgent establishment, on a consensus basis, of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament which should have a clear mandate. International peace and security, economic development and social progress fall within a concept which is not yet completely defined, that of globalization, a concept which must also guide the spirit of negotiations on disarmament in general, and more particularly nuclear disarmament. The conclusion of specific, effective and universal legal agreements is a matter of common interest. It is a matter of interest not to a certain number of States which do or do not possess nuclear weapons or technology, but to the international community as a whole which strengthens the Conference as the sole multilateral forum for that purpose.

Though the political decisions are fundamental, legal considerations are essential in negotiations on nuclear disarmament. Today we can observe with satisfaction the development of international law related to disarmament and the development of specific legal norms such as, for instance, the recognition of the existence and acceptance of the obligation to negotiate in good faith, as pointed out by the International Court of Justice in its important advisory opinion of 8 July 1996. This is a clear legal principle related to the matter, which, though expressed in the form of an advisory opinion from the highest international court, which as you know is not binding by its very nature, nonetheless has very great significance in respect of the formation of international law. This obligation must, moreover, be viewed in the broadest manner, as noted by one of the judges in his individual opinion appended to that advisory opinion. These negotiations in good faith must be concluded, translating political agreements into multilateral legal instruments which would mould the international legal regime related to disarmament in general.

The legal regime concerning nuclear disarmament which today, because of the circumstances and elements we have before us, can be the subject of a codification exercise, must take account of various categories of juridical acts that States formulate, notably the unilateral declarations made by the nuclear-weapon States whereby they offer negative security assurances to the States that do not possess these weapons, which, though it is true that they might be insufficient, in view of their content and the conditions to which they have been subject, can form part of that legal regime which attempts are being made to establish and which must be established.

International law evolves and develops progressively, along with international society. Mutual trust and security in international relations compel us to conclude today that such unilateral declarations have legal value. The unilateral declarations made with the intent of entering into a commitment on the international legal plane have unquestionable value in international law today. The purely unilateral promises that States may formulate at a given time, to facilitate negotiations on specific matters, constitute valid means of acquiring international legal commitments, as the International Court of Justice itself has affirmed in several of its decisions, including the most important and innovative, the decision of December 1974, on the case of nuclear testing in the South Pacific,

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reiterated later in other decisions and taken up by legal doctrine and in the efforts aimed at the codification and progressive development of international law being embarked on in other United Nations bodies.

Of course, we must be clear that, though we consider that these unilateral acts are binding from the legal standpoint and can be part of the legal regime that should be established on the matter, we must recognize that these must be clear and unconditional, thus meeting the expectations of the international community.

In addition to these unilateral declarations, bilateral or plurilateral agreements that certain States might sign can also have legal significance for the purposes of the creation of a universal legal regime on the matter, since they can create expectations and obligations in favour of third parties that have not participated in the negotiations or in the drafting of these legal instruments.

This appreciation is no mere theoretical exercise but rather, to our mind, is of crucial importance in respect of the negotiations now under way and the necessary broader vision that should be given them, to be able to progress and to conclude as soon as possible legal agreements, whatever their form, guaranteeing above all that the nuclear-weapon States will comply with the obligation that has already been imposed on them by evolving international law to conclude negotiations on nuclear disarmament and not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States.

In respect of other items on our agenda, I should like to point out that my delegation also considers it essential to resume negotiations as soon as possible on the prohibition of the production of fissile material, which, as I said before, is part of that nuclear programme. There is no doubt about the important challenge confronting the Conference in addressing the issue of fissile material. The decision adopted last year to establish, under item 1 of the agenda, an ad hoc committee entrusted with negotiating a non-discriminatory multilateral and internationally verifiable treaty which effectively prohibits the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosives must be continued and the negotiations for that purpose must be immediately resumed. The conclusion of a legal instrument on the subject would constitute a non-proliferation measure as well as furthering nuclear disarmament.

We are convinced of the need to establish an appropriate and effective legal regime enabling us to prevent the use of outer space for purposes other than peaceful purposes. In this regard, we should like to observe that in the report submitted by the Special Coordinator, Ambassador Palihakkara of Sri Lanka, the Conference in principle has no objection to the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee on the prevention of an arms race in outer space with a revised mandate, a position reflected in last year's United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/76.

Another item of special interest to my delegation is the item relating to anti-personnel mines. After the fortieth ratification submitted in

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September 1998, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction will enter into force next March. Though this instrument will, to a large extent, make it possible to mitigate the problems that these devices have generated, we shall not succeed in putting an end to them as long as universal participation in the Convention is not achieved. To our mind, it is imperative for this Conference to study appropriate measures to enhance and complement the international commitments on the matter. Hence we support the re-establishment of the Special Coordinator to study the creation of a committee entrusted with negotiating an agreement on the prohibition of the transfer of anti-personnel mines, an agreement which, far from replacing the Ottawa Convention, would complement it.

To conclude, I should like to refer to the item relating to the expansion of the Conference, which, to our mind, should not negatively affect the effectiveness of its work in any way. The necessary universal view of the work of the Conference enables us to conclude today that it is possible to expand it and allow the participation of all those States that are interested in contributing their efforts, to the crucial negotiations under way in this forum. We are convinced that it is essential to adopt a favourable decision as soon as possible to enable these countries to join in our work. In particular, allow me to express our most resolute support for the aspirations of Ecuador, representing Latin America, a country which I am certain will actively and positively participate in the Conference.

The subject of expansion must be considered along with the questions of the efficiency of our work and the review of the agenda which make up a single item of an organizational nature that deserves our greatest attention. In this regard, in congratulating Ambassadors Hofer, Illanes and Náray on the effort accomplished last year, we share the idea that the reform coordinators should be reappointed following the formula deemed best by this Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Venezuela for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I give the floor to the representative of Belgium, Ambassador Mernier.

Mr. MERNIER (Belgium) (translated from French): I have the honour to be speaking today on behalf of the delegations of Germany, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands and of course my own country.

My delegation would first of all like to congratulate you, Sir, on your accession to the post of President of the Conference on Disarmament. Your wide-ranging experience in security matters and your diplomatic skills are very useful assets at the start of the 1999 session.

The purpose of this joint statement today is confined to the single matter of nuclear disarmament. Our delegations, of course, have other interests within the Conference on Disarmament beyond that single issue. Hence I should like to reaffirm our satisfaction with respect to the agenda which has been adopted. It should also be clear that on nuclear matters, the priority for our five delegations is the negotiation of the treaty banning

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the production of fissile material for military purposes. Our immediate objective here is to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee set up last year within a programme of work which we hope will be adopted as soon as possible. These positions are known, and in the course of the year ahead, we will have occasion to repeat them and to participate fully in the work which they should involve.

Today, however, we wish to restrict ourselves to nuclear disarmament alone, and in this respect to make a collective proposal. The question of nuclear arsenals and their reduction is a major question for the entire international community. We can, of course, welcome the results already achieved. The IMF Treaty on the territory of Europe has done away with the presence of medium-range nuclear systems. The START process has offered and still offers prospects for reductions which can only be welcomed. However, the fact remains that there are still more than 36,000 nuclear warheads and that this situation must be corrected. This is the very purpose of the START process, to which your country, Mr. President, and the Russian Federation are and will remain committed for a long time ahead.

Clearly, the United States and Russia bear primary responsibility at this stage for the dismantling of their arsenals. This does not mean that we forget the existence of the three other nuclear States, whose unilateral reductions we welcome. The very nature of nuclear armaments, however, and their colossal destructive potential, give the entire international community the right to be kept informed of developments on a matter which affects its survival. Proceeding from this observation, our five countries propose to set up within the Conference on Disarmament an ad hoc group which will permit an exchange of views and information on nuclear disarmament. In the past, I have already said in this forum that it is not a matter of committing the Conference on Disarmament to multilateral negotiations on nuclear reductions. That option seems to us to be unrealistic, and above all harmful to the very cause it proposes to serve. The complexity of such reductions, the truly existential dimension they involve for the United States of America and Russia, make it impossible for us to imagine another path than bilateral negotiations between those two Powers.

The multilateralization of nuclear disarmament would call for the establishment of procedures whose negotiation itself would take years and, even were it to see the light of day, could only disturb, constrain, perhaps even block nuclear disarmament. One can imagine the host of difficulties which it would encounter in the parliamentary debates which would have to take place both in Russia and in the United States. Equally, we do not believe it is realistic to set a timetable on a matter as complex as the dismantling of nuclear arsenals. In the nature of things, this will depend on the international context and the domestic policy of the States immediately concerned - all events which are absolutely unforeseeable. It should be made quite clear, therefore, that our proposal in no way seeks to place nuclear disarmament within a multilateral negotiating framework in the Conference on Disarmament.

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Nevertheless, as has already been said, there are 36,000 nuclear warheads which represent a danger for us all. This fact, this figure, gives rise to legitimate concerns. In itself, it should justify a positive response to the no less legitimate desire to be kept regularly and officially informed. This applies all the more for the member States of the NPT, which, in renouncing the nuclear option and accepting the burden of verification of their obligations, did so bearing in mind the commitments made by the nuclear States to cut their arsenals with the ultimate objective of a denuclearized world.

The five delegations on behalf of which I am speaking today think that the time has come to take note of this state of affairs by creating within the Conference on Disarmament a forum which would make possible the regular and official exchange of information and views on nuclear issues. It is important that the global risk run by the non-nuclear-weapon States should be recognized by the nuclear States. It is important that the progress and the difficulties involved in nuclear disarmament should be the subject of regular, official communication. It is important that everyone should be given the means of grasping the facts of an issue, a challenge confronting us all. We are not unaware that such information is provided regularly, for instance, to the United States Congress and the Duma in the Russian Federation. We do not doubt the sincerity of that information, which, incidentally, also appears in many unofficial publications from which we can all draw benefit. But national parliaments and think-tanks are not the international community. On a matter of such gravity, the international community has its own interests which need to be recognized. It has views which it must be able to make known on a similar regular and official basis. It is for the purpose of setting up such a forum that our delegations would like to make the following collective proposal, which I would ask you, Sir, to record as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

(continued in English)

"Proposal on nuclear disarmament

"Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway

"The Conference on Disarmament decides to establish an ad hoc working group to study ways and means of establishing an exchange of information and views within the Conference on endeavours towards nuclear disarmament."

(continued in French)

This proposal seems to us very timely. It is in keeping with the prospects for the months to come, which hold many difficulties but also many opportunities for nuclear disarmament. We fully recognize that this proposal is one among others which are not lacking in merit. What we are suggesting today is the fruit of the reflection of five European countries whose geography and history have made them particularly sensitive to the nuclear threat. It is also the result of an analysis which has sought to reconcile

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what is desirable and what is possible. It is an offer which we hope will be considered by all delegations of goodwill, an offer which seeks to open a dialogue which we have already awaited for far too long.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Belgium for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. That concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I recognize the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco): Mr. President, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your accession to the presidency and to thank you for the good work you have been doing to smooth our way through the start of the session that is never easy to deal with and, of course, to assure you of our support.

If I want to take the floor today, it is on a very specific issue, which is the expansion of membership of the Conference. I might not have all the information that you have gathered these past weeks, but it seems to me that consensus was not yet reached. It probably now exists in the Conference on the proposal of Ambassador Hofer, and I remember that at the end of last session, I made a proposal to go ahead and take a decision on that proposal at the first meeting of the session, but of course I did not mean it literally. If we can do it today, or maybe at the next meeting, I think we would really have another accomplishment which would bode well for the session of 1999.

So, as I said, I might not have all the information, but from what I hear these past weeks, it seems we may be able to speed up a decision, take it, then move on to other matters.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco. As usual, you have read my mind. I intend to raise this as one of the subjects with the Coordinators in a meeting after this meeting, and I certainly very much hope we can progress and move forward on this in the near future.

If there are no other speakers, this concludes our business for today. Before adjourning this meeting, I should like to remind the Group Coordinators, China and the incoming and outgoing Presidents that I will be holding Presidential consultations immediately after this plenary meeting in Conference Room I.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 4 February 1999, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.